

Informational Interviews



Gaining Inside Knowledge

Informational interviews are a great way to gain access to people who can open the right doors for you in your career. Here are some guidelines.

Arrange a Meeting. First, compile a list of people, organizations and industries that interest you. When you call someone, introduce yourself with a 15-second summary of your background and what you're looking for. Ask for 20 minutes of the person's time to provide insight on such topics as hot jobs, industry trends or other significant business issues. In most cases, people are flattered when asked for their opinion. Keep in mind, however, that these are not job interviews; your purpose is to get information. If you ask about employment openings, the individual may feel misled.

Do Your Homework. To prepare, follow the same guidelines you would for a job interview. Consider your career objectives and think about the topics you'd like to explore. For example, if you're meeting to gain insight into a particular company, conduct some initial research through business publications or corporate literature and develop targeted questions. This will demonstrate your knowledge and enthusiasm.

Make It Count. Before the interview starts, confirm how much time the person can give you and describe your objectives briefly. As a courtesy, ask permission to take notes during the meeting, but make sure your note taking doesn't interfere with the flow of conversation.

Accentuate the Positive. You may be asked to provide more information on your background and goals. Be upbeat and concise. Mention notable accomplishments and share your plans for the future. Making a positive impression will help ensure the person will be eager to recommend you for job openings.

Follow Through. Within a day or two of your meeting, send a short thank-you note via regular mail. Express your appreciation for his or her time, and mention one or two points from your interview that you thought were especially helpful. You may also include an interesting article that relates to one of the topics you discussed. ❖

Source: Accountemps Career Resources <www.accountemps.com/career/>

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